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SUBJECT: NEW DEFENSE POLICY ADDRESSES NARCOTICS THREAT

REF: QUITO 02078

¶1. (U) Summary: Since taking office in August 2005, Defense Minister Oswaldo Jarrin has attempted to shift the focus of Ecuador's defense posture away from its traditional rivalry with Peru towards more current national security threats, including that of narco-terror on Ecuador's northern border with Colombia. On August 10 he released a 144-page "white paper" updating the ministry's 2002 defense policy (which Jarrin also spearheaded in an earlier capacity). In a significant departure, the new paper emphasizes the need to beef up security along the Ecuador-Colombia border. Without offering operational detail, the paper is being interpreted here as favoring a more robust military fight against narcotrafficking and illegal armed group activity in Ecuador.

¶2. (U) Civil society leaders have publicly criticized the paper, saying that the Ministry failed to sufficiently consult them before finalizing the document. Others contend that Jarrin is trying to expand the military's mandate to include domestic policing. Jarrin has rebuffed such critics, claiming consultations were conducted in numerous cities and that the military is trying to combat external threats which have violated Ecuadorian territory. Our view is that Jarrin's efforts to refocus policy towards real security threats is positive and supports USG objectives to combat narco-terrorist activity in the region. An important focus left out of the white paper, however, is the crying need to circumscribe the role of the military as arbiter of irregular changes of government. We are hearing some rumblings that Jarrin's paper lacks buy-in from the military rank and file, which does not augur well for implementation after his departure. End Summary.

Jarrin's Defense Policy Released

¶3. (U) Defense Minister Oswaldo Jarrin on August 10 unveiled the Ministry's "National Defense Policy 2006" to a distinguished gathering of high-level GOE officials, foreign military attaches, civil society leaders, and diplomats. President Alfredo Palacio, Foreign Minister Francisco Carrion, and Jarrin addressed the group, all stressing the need for a well defined defense policy to combat growing transnational crime and to protect national sovereignty. In the event's only departure from script, Palacio was heckled by indigenous women from the Amazon region, who denounced the government's protection of oil installations from the forced entry of human rights demonstrators.

¶4. (U) The U.S. Military Group provided financial assistance for the policy update process, allowing the MOD to fly in defense dignitaries from Argentina and Chile. U.S. funding also helped to pay for printing of the text and for the August 10 unveiling.

Background on Jarrin and His Paper

¶5. (U) Jarrin, a retired general and former undersecretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Staff, is the acknowledged mastermind behind the white paper. Immediately after assuming the MOD position in August 2005, Jarrin began efforts to update the 2002 defense strategy, which he had overseen as undersecretary for national defense under former president Gustavo Noboa. To do so, Jarrin convoked security strategists, foreign policy buffs, academics, and civil society leaders to discuss the nation's current security context for inclusion in the revised policy. Nevertheless, unlike the Foreign Ministry's PLANEX (reftel) efforts, the 2006 National Defense Policy is not viewed here as the outcome of an open consultative process, and insiders suggest internal military support for the document is questionable. At least during his tenure, however, the document will constitute the current national defense agenda.

¶6. (U) Like Carrion, Jarrin is considered one of Palacio's strongest ministers. Jarrin's realistic estimation of the regional narco-terrorist threat has made him more in sync with regional USG objectives. Some of our contacts speculate that if Leon Roldos (ID-RED candidate) is successful in his presidential bid, Jarrin could remain as Defense Minister, at least at the outset of the new government. As a former general officer, Jarrin exerts effective control over the military ranks, but the civilian Ministry of Defense structure supporting him is weak.

Defense Strategy Explained

¶7. (U) Jarrin's white paper states that the primary security objective of the Ecuadorian military is to preserve peace and stability of the state, giving priority to political, diplomatic, economic, and other non-military solutions over armed conflict. The paper claims the GOE is open to international cooperation to confront security threats. Through active participation in the United Nations and the Organization of American States, Ecuador seeks to combat transnational effects of the narcotics trade, illegal trafficking in arms, organized crime, and terrorism. Ecuador's response to such threats is shared among the Ecuadorian National Police, Customs, National Council for the Control of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, and the Armed Forces, the paper affirms.

Strategic Objectives Outlined

¶8. (U) The white paper outlines actions aimed at protecting Ecuadorian territory, population, resources, cultural patrimony, and interests, while contributing to regional stability. The document sets out the following strategies to achieve the mission:

- Neutralize threats against territorial integrity in the border regions, at sea, or air.
- Defend national territory and sovereignty against real and potential threats of external aggression.
- Cooperate with institutions and governmental bodies in the case of emergencies.
- Protect strategic areas.
- Contribute to democratic institutions to guarantee judicial order.
- Contribute to the preservation of the natural environment.
- Protect the population, resources, and public services in the event of grave internal unrest.
- Participate in international peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

--Comply with international conventions and treaties for which Ecuador is a signatory.

Ecuador-Colombia Border: New Focus

¶9. (U) In a significant departure from the 2002 defense policy, Jarrin's 2006 update specifically addresses relations with Colombia and the security threat along the common border. The paper notes that Ecuador-Colombia relations have historically been good, but that differences over Colombia's ongoing internal conflict, transnational threats now affecting Ecuador, and the Colombian government's posture have harmed bilateral relations. The paper affirms that Ecuador's proximity to troubled Colombian territory has generated strong pressure to develop a combined military strategy, which would depart from Ecuador's policy of non-intervention in the affairs of sovereign states.

¶10. (U) The white paper expresses GOE concern that narcotrafficking, illegal drug cultivation, environmental damage caused by coca eradication, refugee flows, precursor chemical trading, money laundering, and further involvement of border residents in illicit activities could threaten national security, and have serious domestic social, political, and economic implications. Asserting that the GOE can not afford to ignore such activity, Jarrin's white paper outlines the following priority measures:

- Demand that the Colombian government exercise better control of its border by activating National Centers for Border Attention (CENAF), preventing the transfer of illicit Activities, and increasing Colombian military presence in the vulnerable zones to the north and northeast of Ecuador.
- Maintain Ecuadorian territory free of cultivation and processing of coca.
- Neutralize illegal armed groups active in Ecuador.
- Prevent a potential humanitarian disaster for refugees or displaced persons in Ecuador.
- Preserve the natural environment and natural resources from the impact of eradication of illicit cultivations (in the proximity to national parks - diversity).
- Initiate development programs for the protection of vulnerable populations and the generation of social and economic stability.

¶11. (U) The paper cites the Colombian government's decision to install a CENAF(which house immigration, customs, and other law enforcement agencies) in San Miguel-Putumayo and to activate Brigades 27 and 29 and Mobile Brigade 13 in Putumayo and Narino as positive. The paper explicitly acknowledged USAID assistance in helping UDENOR to invest \$78 m. in social and economic development in the troubled region. The Ecuador-Colombia Binational Border Commission (COMBIFRON), establish in 1996, remains an instrument of mutual confidence preventing government-to-government conflict, the paper noted.

Reform Discussed without Much Detail

¶12. (U) Jarrin's white paper briefly addresses military Reforms in its final chapter. The paper affirms the importance of restructuring the military to better fulfill constitutional mandates and new military responsibilities, but gives little supporting detail. Among several vague bullet points outlining organizational changes needed, the paper notes that the proposed reform to the military's authorization law will address unspecified legal and structural issues.

Reaction Mixed

¶13. (SBU) MFA Director for Border Relations with Colombia Amb. Claudio Cevallos told PolOff on August 22 that he considered Jarrin's paper a step towards redefining Ecuador's national security threats. Despite internal anti-Plan Colombia sentiments, opportunistic politics, and nationalist journalism, Carrion, Jarrin, and others in the GOE are

pushing a greater security and development focus in the border region, he said. Cevallos praised Jarrin's leadership and stressed the need for greater investment in the region to keep Ecuador from transforming into a narco-state.

¶14. (SBU) Bertha Garcia, Ecuador's foremost civil-military relations analyst and Director for the Democracy and Security Foundation at Quito's Catholic University, told PolOff that Jarrin's initiatives were "cosmetic" and off the mark. Garcia said that the white paper would do little to professionalize the military or foster greater respect for democratic norms, and warned that the U.S. should not help strengthen the military further.

¶15. (SBU) Garcia also criticized the military's involvement in the economy, the lack of transparency, and claimed that high-level corruption is rampant. None of these issues is addressed in the white paper, she noted. Garcia agreed that the GOE should focus greater attention towards the Ecuador-Colombia border, but suggested that the Ecuadorian National Police (ENP) should take the lead on internal security matters, not Jarrin's military. Garcia admitted that she and Jarrin are at odds over her public criticism of the armed forces. She lamented her exclusion from the Ministry's security strategy sessions, and said that she had even been prevented from participating in some of the MFA's PLANEX sessions on security.

¶16. (U) Countering criticism, Jarrin in an August 20 interview said that his new defense paper seeks to help the GOE comply with obligations under the International Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism. Jarrin said that new external threats require a "multidimensional" approach in which multiple security elements work collectively to ensure national security. He refuted allegations that he seeks to inappropriately involve the military in internal policing.

USG Interests -----

¶17. (SBU) We view the white paper as generally positive in shifting the GOE's attention towards real security threats posed by transnational criminal and terror groups along the northern border with Colombia. It remains to be seen whether the new policy paper will outlive Jarrin's tenure (or whether Jarrin's tenure might be extended under a new government). Though generally supportive of USG security interests, the new policy paper falls flat on another key USG interest--limiting the role of the Ecuadorian military in irregular changes of government.
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